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The Dynamics of Emigration and Nationality in the Soviet Union

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Soviet emigration policy and practices are largely misunderstood by the vast majority of Western observers. Scholars and other analysts tend to ignore the role of domestic factors in Soviet emigration decisions and instead focus almost exclusively on what they perceive as the linkage between emigration and foreign policy. One significant aspect of contemporary Soviet emigration policy that has received little attention is the relationship of emigration to the broader issue of Soviet nationality policy. Understanding the dynamics of this connection sheds light on factors influencing emigration decisions. A complex set of interlocking elements, whose relative significance varies due to changing circumstances and strategies, determines Soviet emigration policy. As a result, contemporary emigration history may be divided into distinct periods. Below is a twofold discussion of emigration, focusing on the nationality component of emigration and on emigration in the context of *glasnost'* and *perestroika*. Examining how emigration relates to *glasnost'* and *perestroika* is key to understanding the link between nationality issues and emigration.

Who are the Emigrants?

Contemporary Soviet emigration, which began in the late 1960s, has involved mostly Soviet Jews, Germans, and Armenians. The Soviet Jews, who numbered 1,810,876 in the most recent Soviet census (taken in 1979), ranked as the sixteenth largest Soviet nationality. As one of the more than one hundred Soviet nationalities they are close in size to the Soviet Germans, who numbered 1,936,214 (fourteenth largest) in 1979. The majority of contemporary Soviet Germans are ancestors of agricultural settlers who came to Russia at the invitation of Catherine the Great and Alexander I:

In addition to the size of their populations, Soviet Jews and Germans share other similar features. The members of both nationalities are dispersed throughout the USSR and lack a viable national autonomous area. They consider their national territorial homeland to be outside the borders of the Soviet Union. Historically, religion has played an important role in the cultures of both groups.

Soviet nationality practices and policies have affected the position of Jews and Germans vis-à-vis Soviet society. Although part of the "Leninist" compromise, which was necessary to win support of the various nationalities for the newly formed Soviet federation, was to encourage the development of national cultures, the record as concerns Soviet Jews and Germans (and others) has been disappointing. The Soviet Jewish and German nationalities have experienced high rates of assimilation, indicated in part by the declining number of Yiddish and German speakers. Both Jews and Germans trace their desire to emigrate to cultural deprivations and ethnic discrimination.

Armenian emigration has also been a significant factor in contemporary Soviet emigration, but it has taken place on a considerably smaller scale than Jewish and German emigration. It also differs in that Armenians have sought to leave their homeland in the USSR, while both the Jews and Germans consider their homeland to be beyond Soviet borders. The existence of the Armenian Soviet Socialist Republic (SSR) distinguishes Armenian emigration from Jewish and German emigration because it clearly establishes official Soviet recognition of an Armenian homeland in the USSR and thus clouds the relationship between repatriation and Armenian emigration. Because the question of Armenian emigration introduces many new issues, substantially dif-



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ferent from those related to the emigration of Soviet Jews and Germans, it will not be addressed.

The Nationality Component of Soviet Emigration Policy

Three broad aspects have characterized contemporary Soviet emigration policy. First, although fifteen Soviet nationalities consider their national territorial homeland to be outside the borders of the USSR, emigration has been an option for only two of those nationalities: the Soviet Jews and the Soviet Germans.¹ From 1969-September 1988, the emigrant pool was comprised overwhelmingly of Soviet Jews; indeed roughly 290,800 (71%) were Jews and 118,500 (29%) were Germans.² Moreover, permission to emigrate was limited; only a minority within the Jewish and German nationalities have emigrated.

Secondly, emigration decisions were part of a central policy that was officially sanctioned by the highest authorities. Top-level approval is implicit because as a rule, individuals cannot emigrate at will from the Soviet Union. Jewish and German emigration trends followed broadly parallel paths (though peak levels and low points were reached in different years), suggesting not only that decisions on the emigration issue were made centrally, but also that a general policy governed both nationalities. The centralized nature and unified goals of the emigration policy do not indicate that its application was static or invariable; to the contrary, other elements, such as nationality-based distinctions, reflect its diversity.

Thirdly, the application of Soviet emigration policy varied on a regional basis. The scope and size of the emigration movements differed among and within the republics. Some of the variation related to the preferences of Jews and Germans. Bureaucracy also played its part, since decisions made at the top took time to trickle down to the lower echelons, resulting in inevitable time-lags. Nonetheless, inter-republic disparities suggest that local Soviet authorities could exercise considerable control over the size of the emigrant pool by liberally or restrictively applying the broad policy determined by the central authorities in Moscow. Regional tightening and loosening at varying intervals affected not only the number of emigrants, but also the rigidity with which the application process was enforced. The easier

it was in a particular region to obtain a visa, the greater the number of people who chose to apply for permission to emigrate. Similarly, in areas where it was difficult to obtain a visa, fewer people attempted the application process.

Soviet emigration prior to the 1970s chiefly involved refugees seeking repatriation to their homelands. Not only was such emigration determined by negotiated agreements,³ but once the repatriation process was completed, there were no provisions for further emigration. This pattern contrasted with emigration in the 1970s and 1980s, when general principles outlined in several international agreements, rather than specific emigration and/or repatriation agreements, established the context for emigration.

The right of every person to leave and return to her or his own country is recognized by the 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the 1966 International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICPR). As a signatory to the 1975 [Helsinki] Final Act of the Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe (the Final Act) the USSR pledged to facilitate the *freer* movement of peoples across borders and to deal in a "positive and humanitarian spirit" with the applications of those who wish to be reunited with family members. Nonetheless, the Final Act does not establish a right of general emigration or free movement. Like the other agreements mentioned, it is broadly written and does not discuss emigration for particular groups or nationalities. Notwithstanding its affirmation of the provisions approving emigration in the ICPR and the Final Act, the USSR has limited free emigration by selectively granting exit visas.

Contemporary Soviet policy in principle permits emigration to reunify divided families (including cases of bi-national marriages), but does not recognize repatriation as a basis for emigration.⁴ Despite the broad pledges of the Final Act regarding the movement of people, the USSR has relied upon a nationality criterion for emigration. The nationality distinction is reflected in the composition of the emigrant pools and in the unwritten rule requiring that invitations initiating the application process originate from a limited group of countries.

Soviet citizens hoping to emigrate must begin the application process with a formal invitation from a relative abroad who guarantees support for the Soviet immigrant. In most cases, Soviet Jews wishing to emigrate are required to present a written invitation from a family member living in

1 Members of other nationality groups have emigrated on an *ad hoc* basis, not as part of a systematic plan. While others, such as the Pentecostalists, have been permitted to emigrate in small numbers, such emigration is not nationality-based. The fifteen nationalities with a national territorial unit outside the boundaries of the USSR are the Baluchi, Bulgarians, Czechs, Finns, Germans, Greeks, Hungarians, Jews, Koreans, Kurds, Persians, Poles, Rumanians, Slovaks, and Turks.

2 The source of statistics cited throughout this article regarding Soviet Jewish emigration is the Soviet Jewry Research Bureau of the National Conference on Soviet Jewry, New York. The sources for statistics cited throughout this article regarding Soviet German emigration are the Deutsches Rotes Kreuz [German Red Cross], Hamburg, and the Embassy of the Federal Republic of Germany, Washington, D.C.

3 One possible exception was the emigration of Germans to the United States and Canada during 1923-28.

4 The Soviet authorities recognized repatriation as grounds for Soviet German emigration only for former citizens of the German Reich.

Israel; Soviet Germans must obtain an invitation from a relative in the Federal Republic of Germany (FRG). Once permission to emigrate is granted, exit visas are, with few exceptions, issued exclusively for Israel and the FRG. Although a large number of Soviet Jews now have family members residing in countries other than Israel, this procedure persists.⁵

If emigration from the USSR were truly on the basis of reunification of families, it would seem logical that individuals with family members living in any country would be able to present an invitation to join those relatives. But this has not been the case. During the 1970s and 1980s, the privilege of emigrating was generally limited to Soviet Jews and Germans.⁶ This selectivity demonstrates the nationality component of Soviet emigration policy. It also suggests the uniqueness of the Jews and Germans: they were successful, unlike the Ukrainians, Russians, and the various Baltic nationalities. These latter nationalities also have family ties in the West but were not permitted to emigrate.

The varied approaches to Jewish and German emigration reflect broad attitudinal differences towards each nationality. These distinctions are based on the actual and perceived roles of Jews and Germans in Soviet society as well as on the geographic areas in which they are concentrated. The relationship of Jewish emigration to Soviet anti-Zionism in the 1970s, of German emigration to economic and demographic challenges in the early 1980s, and of both emigrations to *glasnost'* and *perestroika* in the late 1980s, illustrates the significance of perceptions and socio-economic roles in the USSR's nationality-based emigration policy.

Anti-Zionism and Jewish Emigration in the 1970s

The large-scale Soviet Jewish emigration of the 1970s stemmed in part from the Soviet modernization process. As part of the effort to improve productivity, efficiency, and quality, technically and administratively skilled workers were brought into outlying urban areas that lacked properly trained personnel. By and large the new workers and administrators were members of the Slavic nationalities. The modernization plan was coupled with affirmative action

programs designed to improve access to jobs and higher education for indigenous group members. Such programs were necessary because the new personnel were usually Russians or other Slavs, whose training, skills and experience made them better candidates for available jobs. Indeed, a process known as "elite integration" was used in an effort to neutralize disaffection among national elites and promote allegiance to the system through expanded educational and professional opportunities. Besides the political advantages of this practice, an anticipated by-product was greater local support for economic revitalization. However, affirmative action was only partially successful because ethnic tensions increased as economic performance grew progressively worse and competition for diminishing opportunities intensified in the 1970s. These circumstances had a direct and negative impact on Soviet Jews.

One of the reasons affirmative action adversely affected Soviet Jews related to the particular socio-demographic characteristics associated with them. Like many Slavic peoples, Soviet Jews were often found in positions of responsibility and skill in the non-Slavic republics, generally at the expense of native groups. Statistically an overwhelmingly urban and well-educated nationality, Soviet Jews are disproportionately overrepresented in white collar and skilled labor occupations. They are also highly assimilated since, as a group, they tend to take on the social and cultural characteristics of the dominant Soviet nationality—Russian. Indeed, because of the ease with which Jews can be perceived as Russians, it would not be difficult to view them as Russian surrogates in the non-Russian republics. Likewise, criticism by the local populations of transplanted Slavs could be redirected toward the Jews as competition increased ethnic friction.

In the 1970s, the Soviet authorities developed a two-track policy coordinating a link between Jewish emigration and the anti-Zionist campaign, making it possible to scapegoat Jews by creating the illusion that they were responsible for the diminishing job opportunities for indigenous nationalities. The policy was enhanced by official portrayal of the emigrants as anti-Soviet Zionists, imperialists, embittered outcasts and/or unsuspecting citizens who were not emigrating voluntarily but were lured from the USSR by false promises of a better life elsewhere.⁷ The void left by emigrat-

⁵ Rudolf Kuznetsov, head of OVIR [Office of Visas and Registration] stated in a 1987 interview: "If a former Soviet citizen who has left for Israel lives in a third country with which the USSR maintains diplomatic relations, and has become a citizen of that country, he can send invitations to his relatives. The invitation will be considered in accordance with established procedure." See "Getting an exit visa... How are human contacts and the reunification of families to be facilitated?", *New Times* (Moscow), No. 28 (July 20, 1987), p. 26. Kuznetsov's statement may reflect a future direction in Soviet emigration policy but to date, such changes have not materialized on a large scale.

⁶ It was also extended to Armenians, Pentecostalists and a small number of spouses in bi-national marriages.

⁷ The following is a characteristic example of the type of press articles that were published: "Hundreds of letters have been received from former Soviet citizens expressing disillusionment with what they have found in Israel and expressing their desire to return to the USSR.... Many letters declare that after living in the Soviet Union it is impossible to accept the ruthless system of class exploitation in Israel.... Still others complain about the inhumanity of the attitude of official Israeli circles towards Jewish immigrants, who are wanted only as cheap manpower or to serve in the armed forces against the Arab peoples." *Soviet News*, April 21, 1970.

ing Jews increased jobs and opportunities for the indigenous population. This strategy indicates that unlike most other nationalities, the Jews occupied a strategic position, for allowing them to emigrate could alleviate ethnic tensions.

The policy was effective because of the specific nature of anti-Israel/anti-Zionist propaganda and the position of Jews in Soviet society.⁸ Combined with historically rooted anti-Semitism, the anti-Zionist propaganda made (and continues to make) the negative image of Israel — and Jews — plausible for many Soviet people. When the Soviet media criticize Israel, or Jews, or Zionists, it is often difficult to recognize which of the three is actually the intended target.⁹ Because Jews are scattered throughout the world, the casual reader may not be able to discern whether the so-called Zionist agents, whose purported goal is global domination, are Israeli Jews, American Jews, or Soviet Jews. This confusion, which seems deliberate, seeks to discredit Jewish people in general. Additionally, anti-Israel/anti-Zionist media barrages are effective as anti-emigration propaganda because of the uniquely negative image the Soviet Union attributes to Israel and Zionism. Unfavorable information about Americans and the United States appears in the Soviet media, but greater access to information and to American visitors, resulting from the post-Stalin thaw and particularly from détente, has helped to balance and reduce the plausibility of hyperbolic reports. Such has not been the case with Israel.

Despite deliberate linking of Jewish emigration to the anti-Zionist campaign, there was no analogous broad-based propaganda initiative regarding the Soviet Germans. As with Jewish emigration, the local press featured stories about emigrants in West Germany who felt they had been deceived, concluding most reports with the Soviet German emigrants declaring their desire to return to the USSR. Other articles attempted to depict would-be emigrants as “bad seeds.” Nevertheless, no large-scale campaign designed to discredit the Germans as a group materialized nor was there any policy affecting the Soviet Germans comparable to the anti-Zionist policy in its impact on the Jews.

The Late 1970s and Early 1980s

In the second half of the 1970s emigration policy was primarily conditioned by domestic issues. Despite arguments to the contrary, emigration trends indicate that the international climate was not primarily responsible for determining

the flow of emigration.¹⁰ Indeed, while West German-Soviet relations improved during the late 1970s, Soviet German emigration after 1976 was curtailed.¹¹ At the same time, Jewish emigration was rapidly accelerating, although US-Soviet relations were deteriorating. The domestic factors responsible for shaping emigration policy in the late 1970s were Soviet nationality considerations and inter-ethnic relations, anti-Zionism, and the necessity of confronting the demands of a significant segment of the population that could not be quieted by imprisoning the outspoken critics, as had been the case during Stalin’s rule. The fluctuations in emigration rates and the inverse levels of Jewish and German emigration in the late 1970s indicate that although there may have been a consensus regarding the agenda of broad goals to be pursued by the Soviet Union, the policies for attaining those objectives were not consistent.

In the 1980s, domestic considerations remained the driving force behind emigration policy. The reduction in German emigration begun in 1977 continued during the first half of the decade, reaching a low of 460 Soviet German emigrants in 1985. Additionally, Jewish emigration was drastically curtailed during the early 1980s, falling from a peak of 51,320 emigrants in 1979 to less than one thousand in 1986.¹² While numerous analyses (primarily those that see emigration as a barometer for US-Soviet relations) have been offered to explain the decreases, it is important to recognize that the USSR faced significant domestic difficulties (exacerbated by such problems as an increasingly intractable war in Afghanistan), which directly affected emigration. In the 1970s, the Soviet approach was to address a range of nationality and other domestic problems by increasing emigration, whereas in the early 1980s the strategy for facing those issues was to curtail emigration.

By the 1980s, the impact of labor shortages in the industrialized areas of the USSR as well as other demographic imbalances had grown increasingly significant. As changes in the demographic profile became evident and concern arose about population distribution and the future of Soviet industry, emigration was decreased. The policy change probably indicated an attempt to keep labor in the country. The Soviet Germans are primarily laborers and semi-skilled workers and the importance of their contribution to the labor force — or at least the impression that they were necessary — was most likely significant in policy decisions. Moreover, the Soviet Germans provide representation as “Europeans” in Kazakhstan (a republic with a large non-Russian popula-

⁸ The anti-Zionist campaign began in 1967 after the Six Day Arab-Israeli war. Soviet publications routinely label Zionism reactionary and imperialistic. Zionists are considered to be racist international counter-revolutionaries who have commandeered Western mass media in an effort to attain global domination.

⁹ For instance, the following is representative of the types of statements made after 1967: “The Zionists, fulfilling the role of shock troops of imperialism, strive to shake the foundations of the socialist multi-national state, to set the peoples of the USSR against one another, and to sow the seeds of nationalism, chauvinism and anti-Semitism....” Lev Korneyev, “Belated Enlightenment,” *Moskovskaya pravda*, December 2, 1978.

¹⁰ For a discussion of flaws in arguments positing that US-Soviet relations serve as a barometer for emigration see, Laurie P. Salitan, “Politics and Nationality: The Soviet Jews,” in *Politics, Society and Nationality Inside Gorbachev’s Russia*, ed. Seweryn Bialer (Boulder, Colorado: Westview, 1989).

¹¹ German emigration reached 9,704 in 1976. Annual levels dropped to 9,274 (1977), 8,455 (1978), 7,226 (1979), 6,954 (1980), 3,773 (1981), 2,071 (1982), 1,447 (1983), 913 (1984), 460 (1985). The number of German emigrants rose to 753 in 1986 and to an astounding high of 14,488 during 1987, surpassed only by emigration in 1988, which reached 30,136 in the first nine months of the year. See below for a discussion of German emigration in 1987 and 1988.

¹² Emigration fell from the 1979 total of 51,320 to annual levels of 21,471 (1980), 9,447 (1981), 2,688 (1982), 1,314 (1983), 896 (1984), 1,140 (1985), and 914 (1986). See below for a discussion of the dramatic increase in emigration during 1987 and 1988.

tion), where almost forty-seven percent of the Soviet German population resides. The perception of a European presence is a subtle but important consideration given the diminishing Slavic/European birthrate and increasing Central Asian (and predominantly Moslem) birthrate. Reliance on the presence of Russians (or Europeans) to safeguard against regional ethnic tensions has been a traditional feature of Soviet nationality policy.

Additionally, in light of the growing problems, policymakers surely recognized that family reunification is a never-ending process. Uniting some family members through emigration has the effect of creating new family separations. Thus, the leadership took measures to slow emigration with an eye toward eventually terminating it. Also, as non-Slavic birth rates multiplied and demands for affirmative action increased, the potential implications of a continuing emigration to the West presumably had a chilling effect on emigration policy.

Although the array of domestic problems that had prompted the extreme reduction in emigration in the early 1980s remained unchanged, a major policy reevaluation accompanied Gorbachev's rise to General Secretary, resulting in a reversal of existing policy. As Gorbachev began to exercise firm control over Soviet decision-making and unveiled his plans for *perestroika* and the accompanying *glasnost'*, the downward spiral of Jewish and German emigration was suddenly reversed. The emigration of both groups accelerated in 1987, followed by further increases in 1988. Most surprising was that for the first time, the number of German emigrants far exceeded that of Jews.

Gorbachev's Objectives and Emigration During 1987 and 1988

The number of Jewish emigrants reached 8,155 in 1987 and topped 11,500 in the first nine months of 1988. In 1987 Soviet officials announced their decision to handle emigration cases in a more timely fashion and to review refusenik cases with an eye to resolving contested visa decisions and permitting the eventual emigration of the refuseniks.¹³ (Refuseniks are Jews who have applied for exit visas and have been refused.) Increased Jewish emigration in 1987 did not stem from the thaw in US-Soviet relations, nor was its purpose to enhance relations prior to the December 1987 Reagan-Gorbachev summit meeting. Emigration on the magnitude of 1987 did not occur before either the 1985 summit meeting in Geneva or the 1986 summit meeting in Reykjavik. The key to understanding the 1987 policy turnaround is viewing it in the context of Gorbachev's overall objectives.

By and large, Jewish emigration in 1987 represented the partial resolution of the estimated 11,000 outstanding refusenik cases, as opposed to a significant increase in the number of new, first-request cases. Approximately seventy-seven percent of the 1987 emigrants were refuseniks.¹⁴ Permitting the refuseniks to emigrate meant that the problems caused by a large group of disgruntled, mobilized emigration activists could be resolved. Emigration of the refuseniks also enabled the Soviet Union to reduce the number of divided families actively seeking reunification (in the hope that newly divided family members would not choose to emigrate as well), a problem it had committed to resolve by signing the Final Act of the Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe. Fulfilling the obligations of the Final Act could enhance General Secretary Gorbachev's standing among liberals at home and appease critics abroad. Most importantly, resolving the refusenik problem allows Gorbachev to put the situation behind him, rid himself of its legacy, and move on to the pressing issues on his agenda. Maintaining large numbers of refuseniks was undoubtedly a liability, but it is uncertain whether changes in the domestic situation will be sufficient to discourage pressure for future emigration.

Although representing a departure from past practices, Gorbachev's approach to the refusenik problem did not signal a fundamental change in the Soviet anti-emigration stance. Despite a more flexible policy toward the emigration of Jews, Germans and Armenians, restrictions continued and free emigration (by all members of those nationalities or the general Soviet population) remained impossible. In 1987, the relatively small percentage of first request applicants, and a January 1 USSR Council of Ministers' decree revising the regulations on emigration and immigration, bolstered the view that increased emigration would be short-lived. The decree restricted the permissible grounds of emigration to reunion with first degree family members, defined as spouses, parents, or siblings. It also codified the reasons for which exit may be refused, such as knowledge of state secrets, infringement on rights and interests of other Soviet citizens, and outstanding obligations to state, cooperative, or other public organizations.¹⁵ The decree established the legal foundation for emigration as well as the potential to impede emigration via its restrictive eligibility rules. This updated codification of the precise terms of emigration reflects Gorbachev's emphasis on the rule of law.

Yet despite signs that the increased emigration of 1987 would not amount to a radical departure from previous practices, the composition of the emigrant pool in 1988 indicated otherwise. Indeed, slightly less than fifty percent of the emigrants in the first half of 1988 were refuseniks (as opposed to seventy-seven percent in 1987), suggesting that a decision had been made to expand emigration.¹⁶ Increased Jewish

13 See *Pravda*, January 19, 1987; *New York Times*, March 30, 1987, p. A13; *New Times* (Moscow), No. 28, July 20, 1987, pp. 24-26.

14 This statistic is based on unpublished data compiled by Soviet Jewry monitoring bodies.

15 See Resolution of the USSR Council of Ministers, "On Making Amendments to the Regulations on Entry into the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics and on Exit from the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics," *Sobranie postanovlenii Pravitelstva SSSR* [Section one], No. 31, 1986, Item 163, pp. 563-66.

16 At the time this article went to press, data on refuseniks in the emigrant pool was available only through July 1988.

emigration was accompanied (and surpassed) by German emigration, which reached record highs of 14,488 in 1987 and 30,136 in the first nine months of 1988. Armenian emigration was also significantly expanded. The sudden and dramatic surge in the emigration of all three nationalities points to a policy reversal.

On one level, a liberal emigration policy would seem to be contrary to the best interests of *perestroika*. The Gorbachev reforms have emphasized efficiency, skill, quality, technological progress, entrepreneurial endeavors, and cost-efficiency. Many ingredients are necessary for successful reform, including the skilled professionals' support and the intelligentsia's creative participation. Because of their socio-economic position, Jews have the potential to be important contributors to *perestroika*. Insofar as this is true, increased emigration of Soviet Jews would mean a loss of valuable resources. Moreover, emigration of Jews and Germans depletes the already shrinking labor force and further skews the demographic balance toward Central Asians. In the context of greater democratization, restricting emigration to several select groups could lead to demands by other nationalities for the freedom to emigrate. A decision to increase the emigration of particular groups without creating opportunities for others to emigrate might invite a challenge by those passed over.

Glasnost', Democratization, and Emigration

Although the concerns that caused the drastic curtailment of emigration in the early 1980s are still present, the focus of Soviet emigration policy has shifted. Currently, the context for emigration is *glasnost'* and *perestroika*. New emphasis on the rule of law, the rapid and continuing expansion of the boundaries of permissible public discourse, and a palpable desire for real change have provided an umbrella for new policies and expanded opportunities. Increased emigration must be seen as an extension of the internal processes under way in the Soviet Union and cannot be divorced from *glasnost'* and *perestroika*. The decision to relax restrictions on emigration reflects the broad trend toward loosening central controls.

Glasnost' has engendered a greater willingness among Soviets in all walks of life to expose the flaws and vulnerabilities of their system. Today, even in circles outside the Jewish community, questions of freedom of movement and choice of residence within the USSR are emerging as significant issues.¹⁷ Within this setting, the Soviet leadership had only two choices for handling ongoing demand for

emigration: it could continue to impede almost all emigration, or it could permit greater emigration. Past experience showed that pressure for emigration would not cease (indeed, even during the highly restrictive period of 1980-86, the demand for emigration remained strong among the emigration activists, albeit circumscribed by the repressive situation) and pressure could be expected to increase during a more liberal period. A restrictive emigration policy would undermine *glasnost'*, the new image of Party and government responsiveness, and the renewed commitment to the integrity of international documents such as the Final Act. A decision to permit greater (though carefully controlled) emigration, and at the same time provide incentives that might encourage people to choose to remain in the USSR, embodies the spirit of democratization.

Although considerable numbers of Soviet Jews have emigrated since 1986, Jewish emigration has not come close to reaching the all-time high of 51,320 in 1979, nor is it approaching the current level of Soviet German emigration. Though significant, Jewish emigration remains modest by both historical and current comparative measures. At the same time, increasing numbers of Jews have applied to emigrate. As more people are successful in obtaining visas, the number requesting permission to leave rapidly multiplies. Inasmuch as demand remains strong and continues to grow, current emigration levels indicate that a cap is being kept on Jewish emigration, and that deliberate restraint is being exercised over the burgeoning movement. Increasing the level of emigration, while still maintaining control and direction over its scope, enables the leadership to act in concert with *glasnost'* and democratization, yet ensure that emigration not grow into a mass phenomenon detracting attention, energy, and skilled professionals from *perestroika*.¹⁸ Such concerns should not be overlooked when considering the Jews as a group, since their socio-economic position suggests that they are well placed to be contributors to, and beneficiaries (and therefore supporters) of *perestroika*.

Yet in order to encourage Jews to participate actively in *perestroika*, discriminatory practices will have to be curtailed or ended altogether and employment and educational opportunities will have to be expanded. Incentives for remaining in the USSR will be necessary to dissuade those who are disaffected from emigrating. But if Jews benefit from *perestroika*, they will do so at the expense of others, which could trigger anew demands for affirmative action. In turn, this pressure could start another cycle, possibly leading to increased anti-Semitism, which ultimately could spur even greater Jewish demand for emigration.

17 See, for example, Viktor Perevedentsev, "Domicile Registration Reappraised," *Moscow News*, no. 20 (May 22-29, 1988), p. 3. See also Perevedentsev's subsequent article on this subject, "Domicile Registration and *Perestroika*," *Moscow News*, no. 34 (August 28-September 4, 1988), p. 2.

18 During a pre-summit interview for American television, Gorbachev, in a response to a question on emigration and human rights, stated: "...The United States wants... to be an active defender of the rights — of human rights, to resolve their own problems, and what they're organizing is a brain drain. And of course we're protecting ourselves. That's number one." [Emphasis added]. "Gorbachev Interview: The Arms Agreement, Nicaragua and Human Rights," *New York Times*, December 1, 1987, p. A12. See also, David K. Shipler, "Gorbachev Mix on TV is Tough But Cooperative," *New York Times*, December 1, 1987, pp. A1, A12.

Complaints about food shortages and stalled reform plagued Gorbachev in the second half of 1988, suggesting that the path to successful *perestroika* will be long and difficult. The potential impact of these and other setbacks on Jewish emigration is uncertain. Currently there remains a sizable group of people who want to emigrate irrespective of *perestroika*. Indeed, many have declared their intention to leave because they sense that greater liberalization has improved their chances for emigrating.

Precisely what lagging *perestroika* means for the remaining would-be emigrants is unclear. For them, the proper combination of incentives (encompassing both Jewish cultural and religious life and educational/professional opportunities for Soviet Jews) could make the difference between emigrating and remaining in the USSR. So too, could assurances that the opportunity to leave would be an established right that could be exercised if at some later date they wished to emigrate. Enthusiasm and support for *perestroika* will last as long as *glasnost'* remains a fixture of the Soviet scene and the promise of future rewards does not seem too elusive. It is unclear how long the members of this second group of potential emigrants will wait before judging the successes and failures of Gorbachev's reforms, and what impact their evaluations will have on emigration. Finally, the results of social, political, and economic *perestroika* will also determine whether a third, and entirely new group of applicants, who never before contemplated emigration, will emerge.

A series of ethnic crises in the Soviet Union has also had an effect on emigration policy. In the past several years, nationality tension has erupted in many of the Soviet republics—notably Kazakhstan, Armenia, Azerbaijan, and the Baltics. The Ukraine and the Siberian region of Yakutia have also experienced ethnic dissension. Many nationalities, including the Crimean Tatars and the Russians, have staged public demonstrations and engaged in various types of nationalist activity. The roots of ethnic discord in the Soviet Union range from controversial language and cultural policies to issues of national autonomy, territorial rights, religious tolerance, cadres policy, and regional inequalities. Not only have entrenched ethnic allegiances, time-worn inter-ethnic disputes, and provincialism proven intractable for Soviet policy-makers, but in the atmosphere of *glasnost'*, they have surfaced and been reinvigorated.

The Soviet leadership has shown considerable variation in its carrot-and-stick approach to the nationality situation. The strategy can be seen in the response to the demands of the various nationalities, including the Jews and Germans who want to leave. In each ethnic crisis, the leadership tolerated a circumscribed level of discord, which differed on a case by case basis. Indeed, in every display of ethnic nationalism or pressure — ranging in most cases from public protests, demonstrations, hunger strikes and critical press articles, to unique situations such as events in the Baltic republics surrounding the formation of grass-roots political organizations — the official tolerance of the Soviet

leadership could not be stretched beyond an unwritten but perceptible limit.

While it is not surprising that the leadership has delineated boundaries and differentiates in determining them vis-à-vis the various nationalities, the degree of "cooperation" it extends toward the various ethnic groups and its flexible approach to resolving some of the issues marks a distinct change. Thus, the June 1988 decision to deny the Crimean Tatar request for reinstatement of their autonomous homeland was not uncharacteristic, but the establishment of a high level commission created expressly to review the question was unique. Likewise, the rejection of a territorial solution in 1988 for the disputed Nagorno-Karabakh region was predictable, as were the heavy-handed responses to the escalating crisis. But it was unprecedented that the issue was examined at the highest levels of the Communist Party and Soviet government, and in particular, that it was reported in the Soviet press.

These examples indicate that while a great deal has yet to change in substance, there has been considerable modification in form. Nowhere is such change better demonstrated than in the case of emigration. The emigration of Jews has increased significantly, and Soviet Jews who wish to emigrate, practice Judaism, or participate in Jewish cultural activities are no longer routinely harassed. Nonetheless, despite demonstrated demand for greater emigration, the scope of emigration is still narrower than it was in earlier years, and Jewish activists continue to face difficulties, impediments, and occasionally, harsh treatment.

With regard to the Soviet Germans, it seems that the scale of Soviet German emigration in 1987 and 1988 may represent a temporary situation, for the large number of emigrants is so anomalous as to suggest a highly focused and deliberate policy that would be problematic to sustain over the long term. The desire for joint ventures and increased trade opportunities with the Federal Republic of Germany may have provided some motivation for the surge in German emigration, but alone cannot explain the inflated levels.

While the Soviet Union stands to gain as much or more from improved trade and other relations with the United States, the pace of Jewish emigration has been kept much slower than that of German emigration. By the end of 1988, government and private industry in the US were far more reluctant to make commercial commitments to the Soviet Union than were Western Europe and Japan. If emigration were used as an inducement to improve Soviet-West German relations, it would seem logical to assume that emigration would be used as an incentive in the Jewish case as well. Moreover, because Soviet German emigration is not a well-publicized issue in the FRG, a liberalized emigration policy affords little, if any benefit, in terms of improved standing among the West German electorate. This contrasts with the United States, where Soviet Jewish emigration is given considerable public exposure, and both the treatment of Soviet

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Jews and fluctuations in emigration rates are reported and publicized.

Gorbachev's Challenge

If Gorbachev is to drive *perestroika* by undertaking the full de-Stalinization of Soviet society, he will need to address the specific abuses of Stalin — including those related to the nationalities. The General Secretary began this process in his November 2, 1987 speech on the occasion of the 70th Anniversary Celebration of the October 1917 Revolution, and continued it with the official rehabilitation of Nikolai I. Bukharin, Lev B. Kamenev, and Grigory Y. Zinoviev and others in 1988. The re-writing of secondary school history books starting in 1988 reflects the broadening of the process. With respect to Stalin's treatment of the Jews, issues such as the Doctors' Plot, deportations, executions, and Jewish cultural annihilation will have to be addressed.¹⁹ So too, will the fate of the Jews during the Holocaust, which is still not specifically treated in Soviet history books. Similarly, the deportation of the Soviet Germans, the dissolution of the Volga German ASSR, and the disintegration of German cultural life as a direct result of Stalin's actions are issues that cannot be ignored. The treatment of nationality grievances is an important indicator of Gorbachev's ability to reconstitute society and establish new norms.

Changes in emigration since 1986 focus attention on the question of precisely how emigration policy is determined. The connection between increased emigration levels and *glasnost'* and *perestroika* suggest that emigration is to some degree a component of the reform process. Though the intentions behind the Gorbachev reforms are a subject of political debates in the West, it seems clear that *perestroika* is a response to domestic Soviet problems and crises, and is not designed as a ploy to de-stabilize or otherwise negatively impact on the West. Emigration must thus be considered for its relationship to the Soviet domestic setting.

The array of issues conditioning emigration policy have varied over time, but nationality considerations have been a constant throughout all periods. In light of Soviet reforms and the ethnic problems the USSR is facing, emigration is an important issue to monitor. How the Soviet Union addresses the questions of reunification of family, repatriation, and freedom of movement may illuminate the scope of Soviet reform in general and the role of individual nationalities in Soviet society in particular.

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¹⁹ An article candidly discussing the Doctors' Plot was published in *Moscow News* in early 1988, but to date, except for the memoirs of Yakov Rapoport, who was arrested in connection with the Doctor's Plot, nothing specifically treating the Jewish aspect of the Doctors' Plot has been published in the mainstream Soviet press. See *Moscow News*, no. 6 (February 14-21, 1988), p. 16. Rapoport's memoirs were published in *Druzhba narodov*, no. 4 (April 1988), pp. 222.